

'Grand Secretary' Jacob Springer

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Memorial Two: *Cracking Corruption*

Dearest Son of Heaven,

I am incredibly honored by your consideration of my last memorial. While my reformation proposal was turned down, your contemplation over the Civil Service examination system's current state has reassured me of its efficiency and dependability. Our Kingdom resides in a state of peace and virtue upon the receipt of your imperial edicts. In these past few audiences, the Grand Secretariat has brought forth immeasurably difficult issues that represented potential downfall were they to be improperly addressed. With each of your decisions, you have commendably handled the Yellow River crisis, the tolerance of Jesuits and Eunuchs, the status of the examination system, the threat of piracy and the Mongols, and the system of taxation. This level of leadership is one that only you, Emperor Wanli, can attain. While you have substantially improved our dynasty's processes, I hope to advise you further on the issue of corruption. Being that corruption was a concern in reforming the examination system and that you have not declared an imperial edict on this specific subject, I see it as my duty as a Grand Secretary to propose my ideas on the matter.

Corruption is a conduct that has plagued Chinese Kingdoms for centuries - from the bottommost bureaucracies to the high position of First Grand Secretary. In our own dynasty, we have seen this conduct with former First Grand Secretary Chang Chü-cheng, who worked off of his own self-interests to capitalize on the taxation system and reap immense benefits from his

position (Huang, p. 33). This abuse of power is evidence that our high officials are not even remotely immune to fraudulent behavior when granted the opportunity. We in the Grand Secretariat have spent a majority of our lives studying and embodying the Confucian curriculum that makes up our education system (Carnes & Gardner, p. 21). While this knowledge grants us the opportunity to define ourselves as Confucian scholars, it does not prevent the infiltration of our nefarious humanity into the practice of Confucian principles. Therefore, when a bureaucratic official falls victim to a path of dishonesty, we must have a system in place to address the individual that properly condemns the wrongdoing yet maintains the virtue of our Kingdom. Additionally, we must take on a preemptive front and determine a course of action that will prevent further corruption.

When a beaver seeks to maintain a healthy home, he must build a dam to evade the onslaught of rushing water. By constructing this barrier, the beaver is able to create a pond of quiet water in which he can flourish. This preemptive technique is not unknown to China. In the 7th century, early Chinese kingdoms developed border fortifications to protect themselves from barbaric invasions and raids of their neighboring states (Encyclopedia Britannica, "Great Wall of China"). In this same sense, we must forestall the invasion of corruption within each bureaucratic level of our dynasty by installing an impenetrable rule of law that disallows corruption from destroying our harmonious society. While I do believe that increasing the salaries of bureaucratic officials would potentially deter some aspects of financial corruption within the lower levels, I wholeheartedly believe that this response would combat the implementation of virtue, as it contradicts key Confucian principles. Confucius said, "The gentleman understands what is moral. The small man understands what is profitable" (Book IV.16). Our response to the abandonment of virtue should not be to offer higher wages, it should be to extract the official

altogether. Only a small man would argue that profit has any correlation to *de*. “*De* is the power possessed by one who has brought total perfection to the practice of *ren*” (Carnes & Gardner, p. 17). Benevolence is not found when practicing morality simply to obtain a profit. Therefore, our desired course of action must not be financially based. In 1577, Li Chih, an instructor at the Imperial University in Nanking, rejected the rigid standards of Hai Jui and determined that high official posts should not only be prestigious but also lucrative (Huang, p. 191). Chih’s actions are a blatant exploitation of the respected offices throughout the Kingdom and a self-serving rejection of Confucian ideology. One who defines himself as a Confucian scholar simply cannot support this proposal.

In order to prevent any further corruption, I propose that we reform the structure of the Grand Secretariat. One could argue that corruption stems from the current Civil Service examination system, as I did in my first memorial. On the other hand, one could argue that corruption would arise from the implementation of a system of recommendation. Therefore, to counterbalance this notion, I propose that we split the Grand Secretariat into two separate but equal branches. One of these branches would continue to be comprised of Confucian scholars who exceed expectations on the examinations. The other branch would be formed through the system of recommendation brought up in my previous memorial, ensuring that the advice Your Majesty receives is rooted in both Confucian philosophy and real-world expertise. The strongest and most vibrant trees are the ones that evenly disperse their roots in all directions. In order to maintain a powerful and lively Kingdom, we must ground our bureaucratic structure in this same fashion.

While this proposal would avert future corruption, we must also determine a course of action that extracts the current corruption that afflicts our dynasty at every official level,

including the Grand Secretariat. “The Master said, ‘Do not make plans together with others whose *dao* differs from yours’” (Book XV.40). One who is corrupt cannot simultaneously promote a “perfectly harmonious social and political order” (Carnes & Gardner, p. 17).

Therefore, in accordance with the *Analects*, we cannot continue forward with a Grand Secretary that practices a different *dao* than our most righteous leader, Your Excellency. With this in mind, it is the Grand Secretariat's duty to expose corrupt officials so that they may be exiled from their positions and receive their well-deserved punishment. When it was revealed that Chang Chü-cheng had behaved fraudulently, your court was not hesitant to promote the denunciation of him and his movement (Huang, p. 34). To maintain harmony and virtue within the Grand Secretariat, your most privileged advisors, we must denounce our corrupt officials in the same way as your high courts.

O most noble and illustrious Emperor, I fear that you will not be properly advised under the influence of a corrupt Grand Secretariat. Therefore, on the issue of succession, I commend your hesitation to name your successor as it is vital to expunge sleazy advice from the pool of recommendation. This issue is of the utmost importance for the preservation of our dynasty. You have exceeded expectations as Emperor and must appoint a successor that can measure up to your enormous strides. I hope to dissuade you from making any decision on this issue without first eradicating the self-serving, dishonest individuals from their posts. While other Grand Secretaries will argue that the “social order and stability of the empire depend on hierarchical precepts,” I assert that our social order would be extensively harmed were we to diminish the importance of the Way by acting hastily. (Carnes & Gardner, p. 6). “The Master said, ‘In guiding a state of a thousand chariots, approach your duties with reverence and be trustworthy in what

you say” (Book I.5). This issue does not require a rapid decision, but rather a reverent and informed one.

You know what is best for our Kingdom. While the Grand Secretaries have a responsibility to advise you, they must not question your judgment or persuade you to accomplish their own self-interests. I place the entirety of my confidence and trust in your ability to attack corruption head-on and name your successor at the proper time with the proper advice. I submit my complete cooperation and support as you take on this ordeal.

## Bibliography

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